



CITY OF DURHAM | NORTH CAROLINA

Cover Sheet

DurhamFirst and a Culture of Service

City of Durham, North Carolina

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SYNOPSIS

DurhamFirst and a Culture of Service

Intent of the project/program/service

Robert O'Neill, executive director of ICMA, in writing about high performance, identifies the necessity of "creating powerful meaning for those who work within our organizations." The City of Durham, North Carolina, began an initiative in 2003, called DurhamFirst to create a high performing organization. A highly successful aspect of DurhamFirst has been to identify the organization's core values and to recognize employees for demonstrating these values. Employees can be nominated for recognition by other employees and by citizens. Other important components of DurhamFirst have involved developing leaders at all levels of the organization and building on strengths.

Shortly after Tom Bonfield accepted the position as Durham's City Manager in 2009, he challenged the steering team of DurhamFirst to create a "Culture of Service" in our organization. When Tom talks about Culture of Service, he speaks about the choice to work in public service, the ability of every employee to make a difference in the lives of citizens and the community, and the opportunity we have to look back at the end of our careers and realize that what we did matters.

The steering team took up the challenge and has built the Culture of Service initiative on the foundation of DurhamFirst. This avoids "flavor of the month" associations and highlights the importance and staying power of DurhamFirst. The Culture of Service initiative provides varied and numerous pathways for employees to connect their idea of "service" to their life's purpose at work.

Anticipated and actual outcomes

A key tenant of DurhamFirst is the belief that by building on strengths and focusing significant attention on positive outcomes, we can achieve amazing things in our organization. Greater employee engagement will lead to higher quality, innovative services as employees tap into the motivation that led them to choose public service as a career. We want employees showing initiative, acting on values and relying less on rules in books.

The City of Durham is using multiple ways to engage employees in the Culture of Service. Specifically these include:

- Engagement Based on Strengths
- Recognizing Positives
 - Core values and STARS
 - Ice Cream Social
 - Tell your Story of Service
- Leadership Development and Learning

Engagement Based on Strengths

Different aspects of the Culture of Service appeal to different people based on their personality types. Two years ago, DurhamFirst implemented a program called *Building a Strengths-Based Organization Using Peoplemap* to improve communication and teamwork. Thus far about half of our employees have been “mapped” into four Peoplemap types: Leader, People, Task or Free Spirit. Each of the types uses their unique style to contribute to what gets done in organizations.

The DurhamFirst steering team began by brainstorming about the Culture of Service after listening to what the City Manager shared. We wanted to create ways for everyone to connect with this initiative. “Leader” types naturally migrated to form “The Big Picture Team,” which defined the vision and the behaviors associated with getting there. “Task” types seized on the processes associated with measurable customer service standards. “People” types formed the “Finding and Creating the Best Team” to do training for employees and create a library where all would have access to videos, books, and online resources. “Free Spirit” types formed the “Engagement and Communication Team” to involve employees in fun, creative ways to be of service.

DurhamFirst steering team members chose the teams they wanted to work on and then teams recruited other employees to get involved. Approximately 50 employees from all departments and all levels of the organization have been engaged in the four primary teams.

Recognizing Positives

Core Values and STARS

An initial focus of DurhamFirst several years ago was to determine our core values. We did so through an inclusive process where hundreds of employees talked about what mattered most to them personally and professionally. From those dialogues we identified the seven core values: 1) Our Employees, 2) Integrity, 3) Customer Service, 4) Teamwork, 5) Leadership, 6) Open Communication and 7) and Fairness.

To reinforce the values, an employee team came up with a process to recognize employees who demonstrate them: STARS (**S**ee an employee demonstrating our values – **T**ell someone about it **A**nd they can be **R**ecognized.) Any employee or citizen can submit a nomination. Each month the selection committee reviews nominations and selects the STARS. STARS are recognized with colorful posters showing their pictures and detailing why they were nominated. The posters are e-mailed to all employees and posted in prominent locations throughout City buildings.

STARS receive 2 hours off, a token gift, lunch at the annual event and a framed certificate signed by the City Manager. Those who are not selected get a letter congratulating them for being nominated and a copy of their nomination.

Ice Cream Social

This year DurhamFirst is hosting the 6th annual Ice Cream Social. An ice cream truck travels to various City facilities Department Directors dip ice cream and serve employees. The event is very popular and grows every year. This year Culture of Service interactive events will travel with the ice cream truck. The City Manager will circulate and invite employees individually to become Culture of Service Champions. There will be a “tip jar” where instead of placing money employees can write tips for improving services or recognition of the good service they see. There will also be quizzes where employees can win small prizes and stations where they can record their stories of service.

Tell Your Story of Service

In addition to our STARS stories, we’re starting a wiki for employees to *Tell Your Story of Service*. As we undertook the Culture of Service initiative, the steering team called on Ray Patchett for his experience as a former City Manager and current organizational development consultant. He emphasized the importance of telling our positive stories. Ray said there are plenty of people to criticize where the organization falls short and that we need to focus on getting our positive stories out for people to see. We expect to have some of our STARS featured on our government TV show in the near future.

Leadership Development and Learning

Another important aspect of the DurhamFirst initiative has been leadership development. The City established three levels of leadership development programs: 1) City College, 2) Management Academy, and 3) Executive Leadership Institute. Graduates of these programs are among the most active participants in the Culture of Service initiative. Seventy graduates of City College participated in a reunion this year, where the theme was “We are the Ones We’ve Been Waiting For.” A concrete idea to come forward was a monthly “Happy Hour Lunch” where employees talk about what’s right with the organization and our jobs instead of griping.

Participants in Management Academy and Executive Leadership Institute are contributing through applied learning team projects. A team in the last Executive Leadership Institute created a DVD documenting how the Core Values were developed. It features interviews with STARS and the people who nominated them, as well as an interview with the City Manager about the Culture of Service. The video is being used to introduce the Culture of Service and promote dialogue at staff meetings and at New Employee Training. The four team projects underway in the current Management Academy are all focused on ways to further the Culture of Service.

As articles are identified that relate to the Culture of Service, they are distributed to employees who are involved in the initiative. Quarterly “lunch-and-learn” meetings are held with the City Manager and employees, creating a forum to share ideas in the articles and discuss other relevant topics. The next DurhamFirst book club discussion is of **The Fred Factor: How passion in your work and life can turn the ordinary into the extraordinary**. Many components of our *Blueprint for the Leadership Pipeline* (www.durhamnc.gov/departments/bms/blueprint/) help employees sharpen their capacity to serve in our organization.

The topic of the annual Fall Leadership Conference will be the role of leaders in *Creating and Growing a Culture of Service*, using our Peopemap experiences. We will focus on the various ways employees view and contribute to service, and specifically on how managers can relate to their direct reports to best

promote a Culture of Service. Our recent Administrative Professionals Conference highlighted Culture of Service.

Innovative characteristics

We are discovering and using many positive strands that have been created in our organization and weaving them together with new ideas to strengthen our Culture of Service. We place a premium on invitation and engagement. We create opportunities where employees can bring their unique strengths, align with employees who share a similar vision, and make a difference in our organization and our community. DurhamFirst and Culture of Service activities are some of the most consistent and positive opportunities for employees to interact and form relationships across departments and with people at different levels in the organization.

Costs and Savings

Direct costs for DurhamFirst and the Culture of Service are minimal. The work is done through committees of employees across the city that believe in the initiative and whose supervisors support their efforts. Much of the power of the Culture of Service initiative comes from discerning an overarching vision, inviting employees to be part of positive change and connecting them with others who share the passion and responsibility.

Obstacles

The obstacles are the usual barriers that must be overcome with any change: inertia, history, competing priorities, resources and staying power. This year was very difficult from a budget standpoint and we lost some employees through a reduction in force. In general, salaries did not increase, but health insurance costs did. Some employees have not been motivated to become involved, using the cutbacks as justification. Having strong and visible support from the top of the organization, such as we have received from the City Manager, is imperative. We are working now to engage our department directors as strong partners and will be focusing on enhancing the sub-cultures within departments.

Understanding the meaning of a Culture of Service takes time. People are quick to view it as customer service, which it includes, but it is much more. As Ray Patchett told us, customer service is external, and with this type of initiative, the goal is to tap into the internal, the individual's "calling to service." It can be threatening, as well exhilarating, to think about fully engaging in work after years of just doing the minimum or following the rules.

Results

As we have focused more on building on our strengths, getting more of what we want, we have seen significant improvements as measured by our biennial organizational climate survey over the past 8 years. We began a journey a few years ago. We've seen progress along the way and the pace is picking up. More people are getting onboard and view ahead is terrific!

Presentation Components

Innovation and Creativity

The DurhamFirst and Culture of Service initiative is improving our organization in many ways. We are helping employees reconnect to their passion for service. We have about a thousand employees who are more aware of their strengths and their potential contributions through the Peoplemap program. We have several hundred employees who have participated in our leadership at all levels development programs (City College, Management Academy, Executive Leadership Institute, and Blueprint for the Leadership Pipeline).

We've recognized hundreds of employees with our STARS program, encouraging employees to look for what others are doing right and for examples of the best in our organization. We are building relationships across departments with task teams, leadership development programs and Culture of Service activities.

We are using innovative "soft" technologies of engagement: Appreciative Inquiry, Now Discover Your Strengths, Peoplemap, World Café, Open Space Technology and others. We are making increased use of computer technology: SharePoint to work collaboratively on documents and share resources; a wiki to tell stories of service; our intranet to post documents, pictures and announcements. We also anticipate filming interviews with some STARS for the government television show and website.

We've also found that some of the old methods of interaction are invaluable – eating a cup of ice cream served by a department director as you get out of your service truck. Having the opportunity to share why you chose to work in public service with a colleague from another department and finding out how much you have in common. Reading a book or article and discussing it with others.

Citizen Outcomes

Our most recent citizen survey and a focus group we conducted showed that citizens are largely satisfied with the level of customer service they receive. Anecdotal events, however, point out that we still have many areas where we can improve – especially where interdepartmental collaboration is needed. We believe that helping employees connect to the larger purpose of work and their own calling to service will continue to raise the satisfaction level within our organization and, ultimately, citizens' satisfaction.

We have given citizens the opportunity to nominate city employees for recognition with our STARS program. We hope to increase the visibility of our Culture of Service initiative in the community through the government television show over the next few months. The City Manager has recently added stories of service to his weekly citizen newsletter.

Applicable Results and Real World Practicality

We have much to share with our peer organizations. We started our journey a few years ago and we have been learning ever since. Specifically we can share how we developed our core values, how we select and recognize our STARS to reinforce those values. We can share the curriculums for our leadership at all levels development programs and our Blueprint for the Leadership Pipeline. We would be happy to share our process for creating customer service standards. We would love to share how we are engaging employees and cultivating a Culture of Service in our organization.

We can show where we started with our Organizational Climate Survey and the progress we have made over the years.

Case Study Presentation

Our team presentation will be made by members of several different departments who are actively engaged in the DurhamFirst steering team and the Culture of Service initiative: Executive Leadership Institute project leader, a team chair, and a STARS selection committee representative. The presentation will include part of the Executive Leadership Institute team video, pictures of various events, copies of STARS posters, and a plan to engage the audience in thinking about how they can take what we've done and modify it for their own organizations.